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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7710  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1246  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4790  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8334  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5896  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1628  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1708  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000441

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA: UN STRATEGY ON FORCED RELOCATIONS

REF: RANGOON 434

RANGOON 00000441 001.4 OF 002

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: UN field workers have reported specific cases of mass, forced relocation throughout Rangoon Division and the Irrawaddy Delta. Two-thirds of relief camps in Labutta have been emptied, large numbers of victims in shelters in Bogale Township are being forced home on a daily basis, and 36 of the 95 camps in Rangoon Division have been emptied. Resolving this issue is one of the UN's highest priorities. ASEAN and the UN presented documentation of the relocations to the Deputy Foreign Minister through the Tripartite Core Group (TCG), and requested the GOB issue a high-level public statement disavowing the practice. The UN has offered to help the GOB provide for victims in the camps and make sure villagers have adequate food, shelter, and medical care in the villages they return to. People are being moved quickly and on a large scale raising concerns that the UN will be unable to address the needs. End summary.

12. (C) Pol/econ chief met with Rebecca Richards (PROTECT), a UN OCHA officer who is temporarily in Rangoon reporting on Cyclone Nargis relief issues to UN Humanitarian Coordinator John Holmes. Richards passed information the UN had gathered on forced relocations in the cyclone affected areas. UN staff on the ground verified that as of May 27, two-thirds of the cyclone victims in camps in Labutta Township have been "returned." Though the UN did not know the exact numbers, they estimated the number was in the tens of thousands. They noted that only three camps in the area remained operational.

13. (C) In Bogale, one of the worst hit areas, the UN reported that the government planned to return 1,000 people per day from the Government-run camps in Maubin, as well as privately-run camps in Bogale Township. The government provided transportation to some villages, but not to others. UN personnel reported that some victims being "returned" received 10,000 kyat per household (\$10), without food or water, and others received nothing. Also in Bogale, the UN reported that as of May 29, the GOB moved 400 victims from two private camps for cyclone victims run by monasteries.

14. (C) Also in Bogale Township, the government closed

several camps run by CBOs, and three "front-line camps" in the worst affected area south of Bogale, and one "middle-line camp" run by the government. The occupants were moved to other camps, or ordered to return to their villages of origin. On May 30, witnesses saw people being moved by truck and by boat out of Bogale town further south. Witnesses reported seeing four-to-six trucks full of people being taken away.

15. (C) On May 31 in Rangoon, a local official visited a settlement in Ahlone Township and forced 500 cyclone victims on a truck back to Labutta. The victims did not want to leave because the area they are from was not habitable. As of May 29, 5,772 people from thirty-six of the ninety-five camps in Rangoon Division sheltering a total of 21,584 people had been forced to return to their villages. Many of these shelters were in schools, which the government wanted vacated in time for the start of the school year on June 2.

16. (C) Richards explained that the UN was not yet calling the "returns" forced relocations because they had not had an opportunity to interview the victims. Pol/econ chief shared with her the information she had obtained from local sources traveling to the Delta who had interviewed several victims that claimed to have been forced from government and private camps.

17. (C) Richards was grateful for the information and stressed that the UN was extremely concerned with the reports. They were making it their highest priority and had called an emergency meeting with UN agency heads in Rangoon to iron out a strategy. Richards informed that Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator Dan Baker had presented Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu the list of documented "return"

RANGOON 00000441 002.4 OF 002

cases during the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) meeting on Tuesday, June 2. In a separate briefing for UN donors on June 3 (septel), Baker said he urged the Deputy Foreign Minister to issue a high-level, public statement that involuntary relocation was not sanctioned by the GOB and that cyclone victims should not be forced to return to their homes without adequate preparation.

18. (C) Kyaw Thu responded that there was no need for a statement because forced relocation was not a GOB policy. Nevertheless, the UN had credible evidence widespread forced relocation was happening and it needed to stop, Baker countered. ASEAN TCG Chair, Singapore Ambassador Robert Chua, also pressed the GOB aggressively to stop the forced relocation. Chua read from an International Herald Tribune article about the relocations and asserted such actions were unacceptable. Baker asked the GOB to work with the UN to make sure that those who wanted to return to their villages from camps had shelter and food they needed. Kyaw Thu agreed to refer the recommendation for a public statement to the Prime Minister after receiving specific information on forced relocations from Baker.

19. (C) Richards elaborated that the UN was trying to work with the GOB and augment their rations to provide shelter, food distribution, and cash-for-work programs to those who want to return to villages, and also for those who choose to stay in camps. The UN requested the GOB share its data with them on where they were moving people and which camps need assistance, which they had agreed to do. Richards noted that so many people were being moved so quickly that the needs assessments the UN had cobbled together would be out of date in one week. The knowledge gap was growing, she asserted. The UN was trying to piece together what the INGOs and the GOB knew so they could reach as many people as possible. If the GOB continued to move people, this would be difficult to do, she said.

110. (C) Comment: Evidence continues to surface of forced returns that could further hamper relief efforts and

jeopardize the already fragile lives of many cyclone victims.

While the movements may not be ill-intentioned, they are poorly thought out and reflect the GOB's fundamental lack of understanding of how to properly run a relief effort. In this context, the expertise of international disaster assistance specialists is ever more vital, and highlights the need for experts to gain access to the most remote parts of the delta. This will be a major test of the coordinating mechanism's ability to resolve a thorny, politically charged issue. If it cannot, senior ASEAN and UN officials will have to speak out about the GOB's unacceptable behavior. End comment.

VILLAROSA